



DAY IN DAY OUT
WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

Difficulties Engaging In the Social World

IS IT AUTISM?

Making friends and engaging in social interactions isn't always easy. But people with autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, struggle more than most. For them, communicating with others can be very difficult. Autism is called a "spectrum" disorder because it's not the same for everyone. Generally, people with autism have difficulties with social communication and engage in repetitive behaviors. ASD can affect learning and problem-solving abilities, yet people with ASD range from being very gifted to having severe challenges.

Scientists don't know the exact causes of ASD. They're working hard to understand how different factors contribute. Genes, biology, and environment all can play a role in its development. Parents of children with ASD may notice their child doesn't respond to their name, avoids eye contact, or interacts with others only to achieve a specific goal. Kids with autism usually don't understand how to play or engage with other children.

DETECTION & TREATMENT

Diagnosing ASD can be difficult as there are no medical tests. Doctors can only look at a child's behavior as they age. The symptoms of ASD usually appear around age two which is why experts recommend children be screened for autism at their 18- and 24-month well-child visits.



Talk with your
doctor if you have
any concerns about
your health.

Researchers are studying ways to better engage people with autism. They're developing tools that aid in learning emotions and interacting with others and they're also looking for ways to identify who's at risk earlier on. That way kids can get help as early as possible. Getting treatment as early as possible may help change the way a child develops. In early infancy, the brain is considered much easier to change and so interventions may have a bigger effect.

Current treatments for autism include behavioral therapy. One of the most widely used strategies is called applied behavior analysis, or ABA, therapy. This therapy uses tools like flashcards to reinforce an understanding of facial emotion.

Experts are also testing theater techniques for honing social and emotional abilities. People with autism act out a play alongside their peers. The plays have different

themes that deal with age-appropriate topics. They focus on every aspect of what someone needs to be successful in their social interactions. You have to think about your own character and what you're projecting with your face, body, voice, and gestures. But you also have to think about the other characters in a play and what they're thinking and what they're feeling and what they're projecting.

Because autism is different for each person, researchers are searching for ways to identify which treatments will work best for whom. You can be diagnosed with ASD at any age. Though symptoms show up in early childhood, they may go unnoticed until later. If you think you or your child may show signs of the condition, talk with your health care provider.

SIGNS OF AUTISM

Children or adults with autism may:

- » Avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- » Have difficulty making friends or interacting with peers
- » Miss social cues, such as facial expressions and gestures
- » Avoid or resist physical contact
- » Not point at objects to show interest or not look at objects when others point at them
- » Have trouble talking about their own feelings or understanding others' feelings
- » Insist on familiar routines and get upset by minor changes
- » Be more or less sensitive than others to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sound

